

NOTICE TO BLACK SEA BASS PERMIT HOLDERS & DEALERS

September 20, 2001

2,000 lb. Weekly Trip Limit Enacted for Fourth Quarter (Oct. - Dec.)

Effective October 1 the Massachusetts black sea bass commercial landing/possession limit will be 2,000 lbs. per week, instead of 2,000 per day as announced last spring. This emergency action was taken by DMF to comply with a similar emergency action taken in early August by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. All states' fisheries have been closed since mid-July when the third quarter quota was reached, and all states' fisheries are scheduled to re-open for the fourth quarter on October 1.

Based on the former rules, the fishery would have re-opened with a 2,000 lbs. per day landing/possession limit and then lowered when 40% of the regional quota (the "trigger") was reached. Massachusetts regulations would have lowered the landing/possession limit to just 250 lbs./day with three no-fishing days (Thurs., Fri., Sat.) after the "trigger" was reached. These rules were consistent with the ASMFC decision for states to allow trip limits to range up from 150 lbs./day not to exceed 1,000 lbs. per week. DMF enacted those emergency rules back in May to satisfy the ASMFC's previous emergency action from April.

DMF's new rules change the landing/possession limit and eliminates both the 40% "trigger" and the no-fishing days. This new strategy was approved by ASMFC and enacted by DMF, designed to extend the quota throughout the three-month (October-December) period.

Massachusetts and other states now have the option of adopting either a 2,000 lb. weekly limit or a 300 lb./day daily limit for the October - December period. DMF has chosen the weekly limit. DMF has been consistently opposed to managing state quotas through weekly limits and instead has enacted daily limits because they are more enforceable. Although a weekly limit will pose some administrative challenges, DMF is willing to experiment with this approach to provide Massachusetts fishermen a full opportunity to participate in the 4th quarter sea bass fishery quota shared among all states. The Massachusetts 2,000 lb. weekly limit will remain in effect until the 4th quarter quota (575,230 lbs.) is reached among all states.

All Massachusetts dealers authorized to purchase black sea bass will be required to submit transaction forms documenting daily purchases (regardless of whether the dealer holds a federal dealer permit) on a weekly basis as well as continue to report weekly landings to the IVR system (dial-a-fish). The transaction form will be mailed to authorized dealers and should be faxed in at the end of each reporting week. Each fishermen should be identified on the transaction form with their DMF permit number. Dealers are reminded that the reporting week begins at 0100 hours on Sunday and ends on midnight Saturday. Reports are expected the Monday after the previous week ends.

All Massachusetts commercial fishermen landing sea bass will be required to keep daily, accurate records of their landings and the dealers who received their fish. DMF-supplied logs are being mailed to all commercial fishermen authorized to harvest sea bass. Those records must be received by DMF within two weeks after the 4th quarter fishery has closed.

The quota for this 4th quarter is 575,230 lbs. to be shared by all states from North Carolina to Massachusetts. Last year during the 4th quarter the quota was 450,661 lbs. that was taken by the end of October. The trip limit was 3,000 lbs. per day, not week. If successful, this ASMFC strategy could extend the fishery well into the fall months and minimize the next closure before the fishery re-opens January 1, 2002.

For more information contact DMF at 617-626-1520.